

## **Christ and Your Tongue**

Proverbs 18:21 (06/11/17)

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**Proverbs 18:21, *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.***

We have spent a number of weeks studying the principle of wisdom in chapters 1-9, and now we come to the practice of wisdom in the rest of Proverbs. This is God's counseling manual if ever there was one. Each of these divinely inspired aphorisms, pithy couplets of counsel, will warn us and direct us into the path of pleasing God by becoming like Christ, who is the wisdom of God.

This is godliness with working clothes on, in your home, in your marriage, your parenting, your financial dealings, in the classroom, at the hospital, in the factory. They deal with our hearts, our attitudes and emotions, our tongues, our hands and our feet. There's nothing mystical or sentimental here. From now until mid-August we'll be reaching into this treasure chest and pulling out various practical topics of godliness that you can take with you and apply each week. When you read about the righteous man in these chapters, see Christ as that man. But as believers we are in Christ, so they apply to us.

Today we're looking at the most important, powerful, and difficult issue in your life: your tongue! When you go to the doctor for a check-up, he may say, "Stick out your tongue and say, 'Ah!'" Why? Because your tongue tells him a lot about what's going on in your body. And folks, the truth is, how you use your tongue is the best indicator of what's going on in your heart. Matthew 12:34 says the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. If there is anything that gets me in trouble, it's what I say! I was convicted about something I said just this week while preparing this message. If you never offend with your tongue, you are a perfect person says James 3:2. I assure you, the only human being who never sinned with their tongue was Jesus Christ.

**Proverbs 18:21, *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.***

You have no more powerful tool for good or evil than your tongue. You can speak death, and you can speak life. The first death-dealing words were spoken in Genesis 3, "Indeed, has God said?" Those deadly words of Satan brought death to the entire human race. Think of the two leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hitler bewitched an angry nation with his many speeches. His tongue brought death and misery to millions of people during his 12-year reign.

Contrast him to Churchill, who in England in 1940 brought hope and courage to a fearful nation as he launched his speeches in Parliament, assuring all England, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.... You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory, there is no survival." And, of course, the Allied forces went on to victory.

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There are at least 150 verses in Proverbs dealing with communication by using our mouths, tongues, lips, and words. We will have to summarize as we hopefully encourage you to apply a reasonable amount of tongue truth this week. These five truths will help you please God and become more like Christ.

**First, God made you with the gift of speech and tied your tongue directly to your heart.** Evolution has never answered the question of the complexity of human language. Where did language come from? It came from God. When God made man in His image, He gave us the gift of speech. Words are the fuel that nurtures human relationships. You hear dogs bark, but you never see them gathering to hear

sermons. When you were dating, you didn't just grunt and make noises. You talked – a lot! You couldn't stop. Human beings talk to one another, for good or ill, for life or for death! It's a gift from God.

Not only that, but God tied your tongue directly to your heart. Jesus told us more than once, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil *man* out of the evil *treasure* brings forth what is evil; **for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.**" (Luke 6:45) Your heart is the source, the roots of your words. You can pretty much tell what's in a man's heart by listening to what he says, though some try to cover an evil heart with false words. God created us that way.

**Second, sin has corrupted our hearts and therefore our tongues, also.** James 3 says our heart is attached, not only to our hearts, but it is set on fire by hell! It is a poisonous monster. No one can tame it. It has the power of death in it! And God is going to judge you based on your words! Matthew 12:36-37, "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." Did you hear that? We are fully responsible for our words. Think of the war of words going on in our world. Political and personal enemies launch verbal missiles and lobby hand grenades of false accusations and slander at one another, not to mention the cursing and crude language being normalized today. We dread to think of some of the verbal attacks that go on behind the front doors of even Christian families. Corrupt tongues speak out of corrupt hearts.

This is why Proverbs is so convicting about the tongue. No one escapes the charge of being a fool when we honestly hear ourselves talk, whether it's in anger, or flattery, or whispering gossip about someone, or lying, or yelling and screaming or being critical or just careless with our words! Your tongue alone is enough to show you your sin and need for forgiveness. An unbridled tongue reveals either an unregenerate heart or at least an undisciplined heart.

**Third, Jesus Christ came to redeem our tongues.** Remember, the power of death and life is in the tongue. Jesus came to pay for the guilt that our deadly words deserve, but not only that. He also came to save our tongues from the power and pollution of their evil. The Spirit of God, like that fiery coal on Isaiah's tongue, begins a work of purifying our talk. Let's face it, a huge part of progressive sanctification is learning to control our tongues and using them to glorify God. And God puts top priority on how we use our tongues! We need to yield to Christ every day to purge our hearts of evil and our tongues of their destructive power. Remember Samson's foxes with their burning tails running through the Philistines standing grain and burning it down, along with the vineyards and the groves. Our tongues can cause greater destruction to our marriages, families, and churches. Some churches have pretty much burned to the ground fueled by slanderous, critical, gossipy tongues.

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**Fourth, your tongue has the power to bring death to others and yourself.** For the sake of our study in Proverbs, I have handpicked five deadly sins of the tongue. There are many more, but let's use these five to examine ourselves.

Lying Proverbs 12:22, *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight.*

God calls lying an abomination, but how easy it is to lie. They seem to just slip out when under pressure to get rid of someone or to sound smart, in the know, be impressive. And then there are the half-truths, falsifying records, not keeping promises. We are born liars. We go forth from the womb speaking lies (Psalm 58:3). God warns us three times in Revelation 21-22 that all liars and those who love lying will have their place in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

Lies destroy character and friendships. Ananias and Sapphira paid dearly for their lies. Parents, you do well to disciple your children into telling the truth.

Proverbs 12:19, *Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.*

Slander There is something our proud, self-loving hearts relish about slander, like a dainty morsel. We love to hear someone else slandered, their character attacked, something negative about that other person. We especially love it when the target of slander is a competitor of ours.

Proverbs 18:8, *The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body.*

Proverbs 10:18, *He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.*

Proverbs 16:28, *A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.*

Slander has the power to slice and destroy others. Vince Foster was a lawyer and associate of President Clinton in the 90's. He was found dead on July 20, 1993, in Fort Marcy Park in Virginia, just up the Potomac River from Washington DC. On a paper torn into 27 pieces found in his briefcase after his death he made notes about the lies, plots, and cover-ups in Washington. Then he added these words about the DC environment, "Here ruining people is considered a sport." (cited by Raymond Ortland, Proverbs: Wisdom that Works). I'm sure this is true about more places than just our nation's capitol.

No one can protect you from being slandered. The slander and gossip about you may be false or true. If true, pray, confess, and resolve the problem. But if it's not true, remember Christ was slandered repeatedly. You belong to Christ. You aren't your own. When attacked, bathe your heart in the truths of God's Word rather than in bitterness and a revenge mission. Remember you belong to Christ. He has forgiven you all and He will never slander you.

Rash, hateful words One author describes this deadly sin of the tongue as shooting razor blades right out of our mouths into the body of that other person.

Proverbs 12:18, *There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 16:27 says a worthless man is digging up evil while his words are a scorching fire. This guy can't forget anything. He was offended twenty years ago and remembers it like it happened yesterday. He needs the gift of forgetting. What about you? Are you carrying around an old offense that you just won't let go? Some carry around the smoldering coals of offenses that should have been buried long ago. Hearts harboring resentment will someday gush out hate.

Flattery Someone named his car Flattery; it got him no where. Flattery comes from a French word that means "to stroke or caress with the flat of the hand." Warren Wiersbe notes the flatterer is patting you on the back only to find a soft spot in which to stick the knife! Don't believe every compliment; no one is that good. But we do enjoy hearing all that amazing stuff about us. It pumps our ego!

Proverbs 26:28, *A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin.*

Proverbs 29:5, *A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his steps.*

Boasting We are not unlike those Pharisees who wanted everyone to know how much they gave, prayed, and fasted. There is nothing quite as obnoxious as hearing a person tooting his own horn about his accomplishments, or, worse, fishing for compliments. Romans 1:30 and 2 Timothy 3:2 put the boasters right beside slanderers, arrogant, and worse.

Parents, here again is a direction from Proverbs we need to work on with our kiddos. "Mine is bigger, better, nicer, prettier, faster, whatever, than Bobby's." No one enjoys being with a boaster, so be encouraged with this truth.

Proverbs 27:2, *Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.*

There are so many more deadly sins of the tongue, words with the power of death in them. That verse says those who love it will eat its fruit. All the corrupt fruit of our tongues comes from our hearts. We need Christ to save us from the sins of our tongue and renew them to life-giving speech.

**Fifth, your tongue has the power to bring life to others and yourself. Here are five life-giving habits for our tongues.**

Truthful The first rule of communication in Ephesians 4 is "Be Honest." Verse 25, *Speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.* Paul Tripp in his book *War of Words* wrote, "Most of our communication problems come because we deceive, distort, and manipulate our words." Trust is based on truth; "I know him; he will tell you the truth." We believe God because He cannot lie. To speak the truth even when it will cost you is the test of your godly character. Christ was the truth and always spoke truth. Beware of the verbal magician, the skilled manipulator who can slide lies past you before you know it. Truth establishes character.

Proverbs 12:19, *Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment.*

Healing Are your words healing, encouraging, full of grace? Do you attack or build up your spouse? The best one verse counsel for our tongues is Ephesians 4:29, *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Proverbs has lots to say about a healing tongue. It is refreshing, encouraging, and sweet with a soft answer.

Proverbs 12:18, *There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 16:24, *Pleasant words are a honeycomb, Sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.*

These verses describe Christ, who did not break the bruised reed or snuff out the smoldering wick. He brings healing, forgiveness, encouragement, and boldness to our hearts.

Appropriate There is a time to speak and a time to be quiet. Proverbs often commends silence, although not when silence is cowardly. But we don't always have to be talking. Proverbs describes the babbling fool. He goes on and on talking mostly about himself and when he is finished he says, "Well, I've been talking about me all this time. How about you talk about me for a while?"

Proverbs 25:11, *Like apples of gold in settings of silver Is a word spoken in right circumstances.*

And here is a short but powerful full-of-life verse, a great verse for your heart.

Proverbs 15:23, *A man has joy in an apt answer, And how delightful is a timely word!*

Before talking, ask yourself, "Is this the right time? Am I talking to the right person? Is this the right place? Do I have the right attitude? Am I saying too much?" An apt answer is needed – not too much, not too little, and at the right time. And the life it brings is joy and delight.

Restraining This is the opposite of a tongue unleashed and blurting out whatever first comes to mind and being a royal nuisance by throwing words around like those pesky helicopter maple seeds that get in every nook and cranny and start growing trees in your gutter or clogging it up so the rain just gushes over ruining your flowerbed underneath. God says in James 1:26 to bridle that tongue or your spiritual life is suspect. Get a firm grip on it. Don't say everything that comes to your mind.

Proverbs 17:27-28, *He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. 28 Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.*

You need two strong guards in your life; one over your heart and one over your mouth. Put a guard over your heart – Proverbs 4:23, *Guard your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.* Post another sturdy guard at your mouth, the outgate of your heart - Proverbs 21:23, *He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles.*

Wise A heart filled with the wisdom from above is the best governor of a woman or man's tongue. Notice the heart-tongue connection in this verse.

Proverbs 16:23, *The heart of the wise instructs his mouth And adds persuasiveness to his lips.*

Lying, slandering, rash, flattering, boastful words are full of death.

Truthful, healing, appropriate, restrained, wise words are full of life.

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Nothing is as convicting as God's words about our tongues. Just think of the people you have gossiped about, insulted, put-down, or discouraged with your griping. Jesus took the divine condemnation for our lies, insults, gossips, putdowns, bragging, false promises, whining, as well as our guilty silences when we should have spoken up. He took it all on Himself there on the cross and by His propitiation He hit the delete button on all our sins. And He also sent us His Spirit to save us from the corruption of our sinful tongues. He is calling you and me to watch and guard our hearts and our tongues because we all speak from what fills our hearts.

We would all do well to apply David's self-counsel in Psalm 39:1 to our own tongues, *I said, "I will guard my ways That I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle While the wicked are in my presence."*